
Pray for General Convention 2006

**An article from the Cathedral Times
by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**

Well, it's General Convention time again. Most regular church-goers or readers of this column know it's been coming up. You attended our series of Dean's Forum presentations on the issues back in the Spring. You have spoken to me or other deputies about impending issues. You have followed the Episcopal News Service items.

General Convention is the official governing body of the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, yet it meets only once every three years. Most of the time, our church is at work daily in the world, in our parishes, and in our dioceses trying our best to honor and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Being a Christian is a daily affair, not something which commands our attention only once every three years!

The best definition I can give of our General Convention is that it combines three equal parts: "part national legislature session, part local county fair, and part huge family reunion." Certainly legislation occurs. I have no idea how many total pieces of legislation will be considered, but the number often tops 500. Some of the legislation is controversial, some of it is honorable, and some of it borders on the trivial. So goes legislation anywhere.

Another part of convention is the county fair flavor. When I was a child, I loved going to the Coweta County Fair, because the booths and the animals and games and rides were so exciting. At General Convention, some of the animals and games and rides are thrilling; but the booths-from the sublime to the ridiculous-are truly representative of the church. Almost every church-related or religion-related company sets up shop.

Finally, the Convention is one-third family reunion. If one has been at all active in the Episcopal Church, he or she is bound to see someone they know or recognize. All the active bishops are present (most estimates are that between 150 and 200 will be there). And the older one gets, the more bishops one knows. Dioceses (110 of them) send four lay deputies and four clergy deputies (that's over 800 more folks). Add the representatives of Episcopal Church Women (ECW) from every diocese, who meet simultaneously. Then add the hundreds of other church officials and friends. You have then a wonderful church family reunion.

Richard Perry and I, both of us serving the Cathedral of St. Philip, are among the eight official deputies from the Diocese of Atlanta. But I know of at least five other parishioners or clergy from the Cathedral who will be visiting. Finally, of course, our own bishop, the Right Reverend Neil Alexander, will be there; and he is among seven nominees for the position of Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. That election, scheduled for June 18, will certainly be one of the highlights of convention this year. Only bishops vote for the Presiding Bishop (the role is really that of "presiding" over the house of bishops), so it really does not matter what I think of the nominees at all! However, I do think Bishop Alexander has a good chance of being elected.

Will this General Convention (the 75th) be controversial? Well, something will be controversial. Sometimes, I do not even know what it will be. Will sexuality be a subject? Yes, it has been for the last thirty years. Will Episcopalians of good faith and good will disagree on important matters? Yes, that has always been the case.

As I did three years ago, I urge us all to pray for General Convention. I will miss two Sundays for it this year; but I will be back June 25 for a Dean's Forum review. I urge you, too, to read official daily reports of General Convention-not

necessarily in the national media, but in the more comprehensive reports from Episcopal News Service (www.episcopalchurch.org/ens). Some special interest groups always offer perspectives, too; but the broadest coverage will probably be by the Episcopal News Service. A fine overview of General Convention has been written by the Convention's Executive Officer, The Reverend Gregory Straub; and you can find it also at the Episcopal church web site.

Finally, I urge us to remember that the heart and soul of Christ's work in the world occurs at the local level, at the parish level, at our level. You are I are blessed to be part of the Cathedral of St. Philip. Certainly we are affected by decisions at the national level and at the worldwide level, but we are where the real initiative and creativity of everyday Christianity is. The best decisions that the Episcopal Church makes every three years are those that have already proven their efficacy and truth at the local level, in parishes throughout our communion. So, the best way we can participate in the national church is to pray, serve, work, and study right where we are. May God bless each of our vocations. And pray for General Convention!

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